DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 323 CG 015 496

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TITLE The Selection of Patients for Psychotherapy by College Students.
PUB DATE Mar 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (27th, Atlanta, GA, March 25-28, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Processes; College Students; *Counselor Attitudes; *Counselor Client Relationship; Helping Relationship; Higher Education; Individual Power; *Interpersonal Attraction; Mental Health; Physical Characteristics; Professional Personnel; Psychological Characteristics; *Psychotherapy; *Therapists

ABSTRACT

Research on the cognitive activity of clinicians during the initial interview has revealed that mental health professionals are often guided by social stereotypes of attractiveness in their choice of patients for intensive individual or group psychotherapy. Specifically, YAVIS patients (young, attractive, verbal, intelligent, successful) are likely to be chosen, although typically these patients have relatively minor problems and tend to recover quickly. The cognitive activities of two groups of college students with differing amounts of training and experience in the field of psychotherapy were compared. Undergraduate (N=15) and graduate (N=15) psychology students viewed a 5-minute, role-play videotape intake interview of a female client suffering from mild depression, and then completed a booklet of rating scales consisting of patient variables, therapist variables, clinician confidence, and differential choices of diagnosis and psychotherapy. Results indicated a significant discriminant function between the experienced and inexperienced groups. The two specific measure ratings with significant differences were "client intelligence" and "clinician's feeling that they could help." No significant relationship occurred between the psychotherapy assignment of a client and the experience of the clinician; inexperienced clinicians chose psychotherapies for their clients similar to those of more experienced clinicians. (NRB)

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THE SELECTION OF PATIENTS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY BY COLLEGE STUDENTS[1]

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Recent research on the cognitive activity of clinicians during the initial interview has revealed that mental health professionals are often guided by various social stereotypes of attractiveness in their choice of patients for intensive individual or group psychotherapy (Blaser, 1977, Goldstein, 1971, Lowinger & Dobie, 1966). Specifically, individuals are likely to be chosen if they are Young, Attractive, Verbal, Intelligent and Successful. These YAVIS patients typically experience relatively minor problems in their lives and tend to recover quickly under almost any type of treatment. On the other, less attractive patients, who are seriously handicapped by major problems, are frequently rejected for psychotherapy and referred elsewhere for medical treatment instead (Goldstein, 1973, Tyson & Sandler, 1971). While traditionally a medical degree, a Ph.D. or the completion of a training analysis have been regarded as important prerequisites for professional psychotherapists, it has been suggested that housewives, bartenders, college students and other interested laymen

can perform as effectively as more experienced clinicians (Matarazzo, 1971). If laymen with little training can perform psychotherapy successfully, it stands to reason that they could also help professional clinicians in the selections of patients for psychotherapy. It was the purpose of the present investigation to compare the cognitive activities of two groups of college students with differing amounts of training and experience in the field of psychotherapy. Two specific hypotheses were formulated on the basis of the relevant literature (Holzberg, Knapp, & Turner, 1967, Matarazzo, 1971, Strupp, 1971): (1) clinically experienced and clinically inexperienced students will not differ in their decisions about the suitability of patients for psychotherapy, and (2) clinically experienced college students will not differ significantly from clinically inexperienced students in their assignment of different forms of psychotherapy to patients.

METHOD

Subjects

Fifteen undergraduates and fifteen graduate students in psychology at the University of South Alabama volunteered to serve as subjects for the present investigation. The

inexperienced group was composed of three male and twelve female undergraduates ranging in age from 18 to 27 years. All of them were enrolled in introductory psychology courses at the time of the study and none had any prior clinical experience. The experienced group was composed of four male and eleven female graduate students ranging in age from 23 to 40 years. All were enrolled in advanced courses in clinical psychology leading to the Masters Degree. Five of the fifteen were enrolled in a clinical practicum course in which they were required to see clients and all but one had some clinical experience.

A series of four five-minute, role played, videotape intake interviews of a female client suffering from mild depression were generated for stimulus presentation. The common theme of the 'loss of a male companion's friendship' was used to provide parallel content and reduce uncontrolled variation. A pilot study was conducted using three Ph.D. clinical psychologists to ascertain whether the vignettes were discriminable and to finalize the selection of the vignette to be used. The vignette selected was that of a 22-year-old,white,female college sophomore who had been enrolled in one of the investigators previous introductory psychology courses. She had no special training in drama but in the words of one of the

Ph.D. clinical psychologists "fakes depression convincingly".

A standard booklet of rating scales was developed by the investigators for the purpose of the study. The booklet was a modified version of the scales used by Blaser (1977) and contained three therapist and seven patient variables. The seven patient variables used were: "candor, introspection, verbal expressiveness, motivation for therapy, intelligence, attractiveness" and "the severity of pathology." The three therapist variables used were: "liking for the patient, interest in the case," and "how much do you feel you could help the patient." The variables were randomly arranged in the booklets so that no two clinicians would be rating the exact same variable at the same time. The booklets also contained ratings scales to measure the confidence of the clinician and a list of differential choices of diagnosis and psychotherapy.

Procedure

In line with the findings that report that laymen with a little training can be as effective as more experienced clinicians, the inexperienced group was given a one hour lecture on psychopathology, psychotherapy and the relevant patient and therapist variables prior to viewing the videotape of the patient. Shortly before viewing the videotape

(1 hour), the inexperienced group was given a 25 item matching test covering the material presented in the lecture. Only those scoring above the 80th percentile on the test were used as clinicians in this investigation.

The experienced group was not given the one hour lecture because it was assumed that they had mastered 'basic' abnormal psychology as presented in general psychology textbooks.

Both the experienced and inexperienced groups viewed the videotaped interview in small groups of seven or eight. The instructions given by the investigator was designed to facilitate the clinician's understanding of the written instructions contained in the booklet and to clarify the clinician's role in the investigation. The clinicians were specifically told to act as if they were clinical psychologists and that the client had appeared before them for assessment and assignment to a psychotherapy treatment. Following the viewing of the entire videotape interview, the clinicians were asked to make their ratings concerning the client using the patient and therapist variables listed in the booklet. They also rated their level of confidence about each of the patient

and therapist variables and assigned the client to a psychotherapy treatment.

Statistics

Discriminant analysis (Nie & etal, 1970) was used to evaluate the mean ratings of the experienced and inexperienced groups, on the ten patient and therapist variables. Student tests were used to evaluate specific variable means and chi square was used to evaluate the relationship between the two groups and their choice of psychotherapy for the client.

RESULTS

A discriminant function was found between the experienced and inexperienced groups (Mahalanobis $D^2 = 29.10$, $p < .001$) which significantly separated the two groups in multidimentional space through the use of the ten patient and therapist variables. This finding rejects the null hypothesis that no significant differences exist beteen the two groups in overall cognitive activity. Further analysis of the specific variable mean ratings revealed that only two of the ten variable means differed significantly (1) "intelligence" of the client ($t = 1.98$, $p < .05$) and (2) the "clinician's feelings that they could help"

($t = 3.78$, $p < .0007$).

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The second hypothesis that no significant relationship exists between the experience of the clinicians and psychotherapy assigned to the client was supported by the finding. A chi square ($\chi^2 = .061$, $p < .05$) was found which is considered insignificant.

DISCUSSION

The significant discriminant function found between the experienced and inexperienced groups was unexpected. Nevertheless, the finding does have some support in the literature. Mettzoff and Kornreich (1970) reviewed several studies concerning the experience of the clinician and concluded that "experience does make a difference in most instances". It appears that the clinician's experience also made a difference in the present study. The two specific mean ratings that were significantly different, "intelligence of the client" and "the clinician's feelings that they could help" are probably the result of the clinician's experience. The experienced clinicians training

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Patient Suitability for Psychotherapy by College Students

Variable	Means	
	Experienced	Inexperienced
Candor	20.0	19.1
Introspection	15.3	16.0
Verbal Expression	20.8	18.0
Motivation	25.6	26.0
Intelligence	25.3	22.2*
Attractiveness	21.8	20.5
Likeability	22.0	23.4
Pathology	19.8	21.6
Interest in Case	26.7	27.7
Feeling Could Help	35.8	23.2**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

and contact with actual clients possbily prepared them to make more informed judgments about the clients that were different from those of the inexperienced clinicians. The inexperienced clinicians by contrast had no real data base from which to judge the client and probably relied more on their knowledge of the definitions of the terms, etc. during the decision making process.

The chi square found between the experienced and inexperienced groups and their choice of psychotherapy for the client suggest that there is no significant relationship between the psychotherapy assignment of a client and the experience of the clinician. Apparently, inexperienced clinicians choose psychotherapies for their clients similiar to those of more experienced clinicians.

The above findings theoretically shed doubt on the utility of the rating scales as a measure of assessing suitability for psychotherapy or actually points out what Blaser has stated previously that the assessment process is "based on a few or even a single variable and probably biased and stereotyped". It is the opinion of the authors that the assessment process in regards to indications for psychotherapy is even more biased and stereotyped than Blaser thinks and probably can be attri-

buted to the personality of the clinician and his or her intuition. This may be the reason why Blaser was only able to find one genuine indication for psychotherapy. If the findings of this study are generalizable to the real clinical situation, then it suggests some serious shortcomings in the decision making process, as it relates to indications for psychotherapy. More research is definitely needed in this area, especially in regards to determining whether any other indications for psychotherapy can be identified. The present study could have been improved if larger groups of clinicians, of different levels of experience and training, were used in the actual clinical setting to assess the suitability for psychotherapy. An instrument that could measure the clinician's intuition would be of value in ascertaining whether it is a significant variable in the decision making process. The effects of the personality of the clinician on indication for psychotherapy also needs to be more thoroughly investigated.

NOTES

[1]This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association in Atlanta,

Georgia, March, 1981.

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